

## Ornithological Literature

Edited by William E. Davis, Jr.

THE GREAT BLUE HERON: A NATURAL HISTORY AND ECOLOGY OF A SEASHORE SENTINEL. By Robert W. Butler. UBC Press, Vancouver, British Columbia. 1997: 167 pp., 30 black-and-white photos, 24 color plates, 17 numbered text figs., 18 tables. \$39.95 (Canadian) (cloth).—This is a very nice book about a very interesting bird—the Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)—with a particular emphasis on the subspecies that frequents the northwest coast of North America, *A. h. fannini*. However, frequent reference to herons elsewhere broadens the scope and perspective of the book. It is more than just the study of a heron, however, it is the story of the ecology and conservation of a region. Robert Butler is certainly well qualified to tell this story—24 of the more than 150 references cited bear his name as an author. In the brief introductory chapter Butler outlines the aims of the book that include detailing the natural history of the Great Blue Heron, “a worthy symbol of the conservation of coastal habitats,” along the 27,000 kms of fragmented British Columbia coastline. Chapters that follow consider in detail the habitat of the heron (the shores of temperate rainforest), the heron’s food web, the sites where the heron has been studied year around, all with an historical perspective on interactions with man woven through the narrative. There are chapters on foraging, food and diet, social and territorial behavior, colonial nesting, habitat selection, population dynamics, and finally a chapter on the conservation of Great Blue Herons and the Strait of Georgia ecosystem. An epilogue concludes with the optimistic thought that many people are beginning to recognize that the environment provides more than just resources, and that restoring environments will yield great future dividends. Appendices report records of Great Blue Heron colonies, length-mass regression equations for fish, effects of increased disturbance on heron populations, and lists of scientific names of plants and animals.

The book is very well written. It is clear

that the author thoroughly enjoys his research on herons (including night-vision telescopic sleuthing), and his descriptions have an almost poetic touch: “I look back on the long hours spent watching herons catch fish as an enjoyable period of my life. Perched in the shade on a prominent location overlooking spectacular scenery, the smell of the sea and arbutus leaves carried on a warm breeze, gulls and shorebirds busily feeding along the mudflat—it was hard to beat,” or “On calm nights I often slept on the beach beneath the stars. I welcomed the silence of the night after a day in the colony, though the quiet was periodically disturbed by landing calls ringing from the forest.” Even his descriptions of natural history phenomena make for pleasant reading: “The delicate choreographed displays of a threatening heron are exquisite.”

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book. It contained a great deal of interesting and important scientific information about Great Blue Herons, and a well articulated conservation perspective. I recommend it to anyone interested in avian biology or conservation.—  
WILLIAM E. DAVIS, JR.

A GUIDE TO THE IDENTIFICATION AND NATURAL HISTORY OF THE SPARROWS OF THE UNITED STATES. By James D. Rising. Illustrated by David D. Beadle. Academic Press, New York. 1996: 365 pp., 27 color plates with captions, 53 color range maps, \$42.00 (cloth).—Until the last three years, those of us fascinated by details of the natural history of sparrows in North America had only Bent’s life histories for a reference. With the publication of *Sparrows and Buntings—A Guide to the Sparrows and Buntings of North American and the World* in 1995, and now this guide, we have substantially more information of a recent vintage at our finger tips. This is a good book. Because of its less ambitious geographic coverage,